



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
Division of Student Affairs
Greek Life and Experiential Learning

The Role of the University Advisor

Student organizations do not become successful simply on their own. Behind every successful group there are important and influential people. The University Advisor (UA) is key to a group's success. Their guidance and support allow members of student groups to develop skills to successfully carry out the mission of the organization. Good advisors inspire, support, and challenge their groups so they can reach their highest levels of success.

The University Advisor and the members of an organization often have different ideas of what an advisor's responsibilities are or should be. It is important that both the members and the UA understand the role the advisor will take. When beginning to work with a new organization or are beginning another year with the group it may be beneficial to meet with the organization's leaders to discuss the UA role. It is very important that both the students and the UA understand their expectations.

A University Advisor should:

- Build a good rapport with students in the organization they advise. Only through building good relationships with group members can advisors be effective and influential. Advisors begin building rapport simply by knowing everyone in the organization and attending group functions.
- Find a good balance between being overly involved and under-involved. Advisors set principles and offer guidance and do not directly do the work which is the responsibility of the students.
- Strive for the group to be self-sufficient where the members resolve their own conflicts and solve their own problems. Students grow more from their own choices than following orders.
- Allow the group to fail. Although this is often a difficult thing to watch, it is a very powerful in developing student leaders. Failure can be the best learning experience. It is also important that the advisor not take responsibility for an organization's failures. The choice of whether or not to act is the students' decision. An advisor feeling overly responsible is most likely too involved in the group.
- Model the behavior they would like to see repeated. When a good rapport has developed students will model themselves after their advisor.
- Provide members with constant support but also challenge leaders to continue developing

themselves and the organization.

- Develop a presence at organization meeting and functions.

The relationship between the University Advisor and an organization will vary, not only with each organization, but from time to time within an organization. Nevertheless, the general concerns of the UA remain constant. Below is an outline of expectations of a University Advisor in order to give both the UA and the organization a base from which to develop a mutually beneficial relationship.

Basic Expectations of the University Advisor

- ✓ The UA recognizes and supports participation in student organizations for its contribution to the educational and personal development of students.
- ✓ UAs should work with student organizations but should not direct or dictate the organization's programs or activities. UAs should be frank however, in offering ideas, considerations, or ideas for the group's discussion.
- ✓ The UA should stay well informed about the plans and activities of the group. It is expected that advisors will attend as many meetings and activities of the group as possible and will consult frequently with the student officers.
- ✓ The UA must be aware of the goals and directions of their organization and help the group evaluate its progress toward reaching those goals.
- ✓ The UA can provide continuity within the group from year to year. He or she should be familiar with the constitution and bylaws of the organization and be prepared to assist with the interpretation of such.
- ✓ UAs ensure the group's compliance with University policies and procedures.
- ✓ UAs should provide financial supervision to the organization. Advisors should also be aware of the general financial condition of the organization and make sure the group is keeping accurate and accessible financial records.
- ✓ The UA should assist in orienting new officers and assist in developing the leadership skills of members.
- ✓ The UA should be prepared to deal with major problems or emergencies within the organization.
- ✓ UAs monitor group functioning and encourage members to fully participate, assume appropriate responsibility for group activities, and maintain a balance between academic activities and extra commitments.
- ✓ The UA must be a link to the University administration and serve the group as a resource person.
- ✓ The voluntary association between a UA and an organization should continue as long as both parties believe the relationship is productive and mutually satisfying.

Check your Advising Effectiveness

This evaluation can be used with your student group in order to measure your effectiveness as a University Advisor.

Position Description

The following is a "Position Description" for University Advisors of student organizations. These duties are not binding by any agreement, but are strong suggestions for being an effective University Advisor.

University-Oriented Responsibilities

1. Be a well informed resource on University policies and procedures.
2. Maintain contact with the Office of Greek Life and Experiential Learning (GLEL) through submitting an updated constitution and contact information. Additionally, use GLEL for assistance in organizational problems and concerns.
3. Be familiar with the group's constitution and/or bylaws. Make certain that policies and procedures set by those documents are being followed.
4. Approve all documents that require the University Advisor's signature.
5. Be prepared to respond appropriately if the group experiences a crisis.
6. Help the group evaluate elements of risk in their events.
7. Attend University Advisor training (provided by GLEL) at least once a semester.

Group-Oriented Responsibilities

1. Attend the maximum amount of group meetings possible.
2. Develop good working relationships with group members
3. Maintain appropriate boundaries with group members.
4. Communicate with group leaders regularly.
5. Be a reachable and approachable.
6. Serve as a "sounding board" for group ideas. The proposal of some idea may require that the advisor play the "devils advocate." However, let the group completely voice ideas before doing this.
7. Be familiar with the group's traditions and history.
8. Guide the group in developing activities consistent with their mission /purpose.

9. Guide group members in setting and accomplishing appropriate goals.
10. Evaluate the group success.
11. Provide insight and suggestions from personal experience, but allow the group to make their own decisions.
12. Mediate group conflicts (when necessary).
13. Monitor group finances.
14. Monitor group functions and encourage all members of the group to fully participate but maintain balance between academic responsibilities and co curricular involvement.
15. Connect student group members with on campus student group resources.
16. Develop and maintain a working relationship with group's national affiliations (if necessary).

Facilitation Skills

Facilitation skills can assist the University Advisor in effectively communicating with the organization. These skills can help guide the group through processes and decisions. They are an effective tool of conversation which will enhance the relationship with the group. Facilitation skills are applicable to everything that a University Advisor or a group member does while interacting with the group.

Principles of Facilitation

Definition: *Facilitate:* to make easier, to guide through a process, experience, or conversation.

Facilitating IS: Creating a SAFE environment by:

- Enabling and encouraging people to fully contribute their ideas,
- Acknowledging contributions,
- Listening,
- Focusing equally on group process and content,
- Presenting directions for exercises clearly and enthusiastically,
- Setting expectations but not forcing participation.

Facilitating IS NOT: Creating an UNSAFE environment by:

- Interrupting,
- Being impatient.
- Completing people's sentences for them,
- Attacking those who disagree,
- Sending negative non-verbal messages,
- Lecturing.

A facilitator understands his/her role. The facilitator is many things to the group: moderator, process manager, model, a resource, etc.

Basic Elements of Facilitation

A facilitator allows the group to decide if they proceed with a process. Ownership of the group belongs to the group itself.

- ✓ A facilitator confronts his/her own attitudes and stereotypes.
- ✓ A facilitator does not “save” the group—the group must take responsibility for its own success and challenges.
- ✓ A facilitator respects the opinions of members of the group.
- ✓ A facilitator is not an expert on the issues. It is ok to not have all the answers.
- ✓ A facilitator will help the group members feel comfortable with taking risks, but does not pressure anyone to take those risks.
- ✓ A facilitator will accept all responses as being valid and not look for a “right” answer.
- ✓ A facilitator will encourage group members to respect themselves and others.
- ✓ A facilitator will trust his/her intuition and always have the group's best interest at heart.
- ✓ A facilitator will have fun and build a healthy relationship with the group.

Basic Skills of Facilitation

The following are skills that will be called upon when leading a group through discussion or conversation. Each component is an important part of the overall whole. A University Advisor should become familiar with the techniques, and visualize a situation in which the techniques might be used:

Active Listening: eye-contact, mannerisms, etc.

Focus on Feelings: “How did that experience make you feel?”

Give Recognition: use names, give “thank yous”, etc.

Paraphrase: clarify or summarize a person's statement.

Review: review where the group has been in the conversation.

Focus on Similarities and Differences in the Group: let students know that differences are a good thing.

Involve Everyone: ask quieter individuals if they have anything more to add.

Transfer Leadership: periodically allow students to facilitate their own discussions.

Confrontation

Conflict is an unavoidable part of life and this is especially true when working with organizations. Conflicts can arise between students, with the University, with outside sources and with University Advisors. Effective University Advisors and student leaders must have a good understanding of conflict and ways to resolve them.

Conflict Management

Ability to manage conflict is probably one of the most important social skills an individual can possess.

Six Steps for Conflict Mediation

1. Do not take sides, but when necessary, ask questions for clarification or feedback of your perceptions (don't devalue their position, but help make them aware of how others perceive them).
2. Employ a win-win strategy when possible to resolving conflicts so that each person can walk away feeling understood and feeling as if they won part of the conflict.
3. Help assure that each person's personal integrity is maintained and that individuals do not feel humiliated or put down.
4. Get the conflicts out in the open where they can be discussed among the individuals.
5. Be aware of barriers to conflict resolution (i.e. defensiveness, judgmental reactions, etc.).
6. Do not heighten the conflict by bringing in more people than necessary.

7-Step Plan for Confrontation

Step One: Initiate Contact

Understandably, first you must make contact with the person to be confronted in an appropriate setting. It is best to pick a private place where both individuals do not feel threatened. Also, it is advisable to not "gang-up" on the individual during an initial confrontation. A confrontation team of two or more should only be used for a re-confrontation or for individuals who are perceived to be very resistant to change and only responsive to group opinion or pressure.

Step Two: Establish Rapport

Your second step is to establish a positive rapport with the person. This means the creation of a sense of mutual trust – a sense that both people present really care about each other. Attempts to create an artificial rapport will fail as people are usually more sensitive than we might believe.

Step Three: Identify Issue/Problem

Working with the person, identify the issue or problem that prompted you to seek him or her out. He/She must agree that there is a problem. If not, you must return to Step Two. During the problem identification process, it is important that you not ask the question "Why?" If you do, you will be told why – and that becomes the reason or excuse for the behavior, the justification – at least in the eyes of the other individual. You may ask "What?" but don't let the person's excuse trap you.

Step Four: Problem Is Agreed Upon

The individual being confronted must agree that a problem does, in fact, exist. Otherwise, the person will not buy-in to the following steps – they will lack the necessary motivation. If they do not agree that a problem exists, you must return to either Step Two or Step Three.

Step Five: Obtain Attainable Commitment

After the person agrees that a problem exists, you must mutually agree upon an attainable commitment on his/her part. It must be a commitment which the person has the potential to fulfill. You must provide the person with an opportunity to win, to succeed.

Step Six: Keep Commitment?

On a mutually predetermined date and time, get together again with the individual to determine whether or not he/she has been able to keep the commitment. If so, move to Step Seven. If not, return to Step Five and re-determine what is an attainable commitment from the person.

Step Seven: Praise Success

When a success is realized, offer praise and positive feedback. Then obtain a commitment for further changes by returning to the fifth step and extending what was an attainable commitment. If the individual has not been successful, without being negative, again return to Step Five and reassess what might be an attainable commitment.

Advising Don'ts

- Miss meetings
- Leave meeting early
- Be inattentive
- Take but never give back
- Only get to know the executive board
- Never have the time
- Try to be close friends with the group
- Make all the decisions for the organization
- Let the organization become your organization
- Forget names
- Fail to come through on promises
- Say you know, when you don't
- Be afraid of the group failing
- Forget the amazing contribution you make in students' lives